



CITY OF NEW HAVEN

JUSTIN ELICKER, MAYOR

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Co-Chairs Sen. Lopes and Rep. Gresko, Vice Chairs Sen. Hochadel and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Harding and Rep. Callahan and members of the Environment Committee.

My name is Justin Elicker and I am the Mayor of New Haven. I am writing in support of the Governor's Bill SB 979 AN ACT PROMOTING ENERGY AFFORDABILITY, ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND GREEN CITIES.

I am particularly here in support of Section 2, which would give renters visibility into the energy costs associated with rental units by establishing an energy grading system for rentals, and Section 4, which would empower municipalities like New Haven to adopt zero energy building codes governing the construction of new residential and commercial buildings. I write in support of those provisions, with some suggestions for how to strengthen them.

I am grateful for the Commissioner and the Governor putting this bill to increase energy affordability, reduce carbon emissions, and improve local air quality before the Committee for consideration. The City of New Haven seeks to provide a home where every resident can thrive. Safe, affordable housing, a healthy environment, and a stable climate are key pieces to realizing that vision.

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine one year ago, energy costs have increased dramatically, causing financial hardship for many residents, particularly our most vulnerable. Systemic changes, such as the energy transparency provisions proposed in Section 2, are needed to make housing more affordable in our state. These provisions will help families find rentals with lower energy costs, protect them from unexpectedly high bills, and create a market mechanism to motivate landlords to make energy efficiency improvements. Requiring a grade in a manner consistent with nationally recognized standards and receiving public input to inform adoption will help ensure that the energy transparency program is a success. Similarly, amending this provision to require a public engagement and education process after adoption will be important for implementation.

This energy transparency system should be centered around renters. Its key criterion for evaluating the energy grade should be that the information conveyed be easy for renters to understand. The letter grade system that New York City has instituted clearly presents an energy score to potential renters – this could be a valuable model for Connecticut. It's also information that the onus be on property owners to disclose their buildings' energy grades and that this information be delivered to renters upfront, before renters submit application fees.

Removing the exemptions for buildings built after 2000 or owner-occupied buildings will make it easier for renters to compare properties. Similarly, instituting a grading system statewide will help renters compare properties. Unless, in-person audits are required, the state should require this program to be instituted statewide by July 1, 2025. Civil penalties will help with enforcement, but a state-level mechanism would assist renters and municipalities in strengthening compliance.

New Haven has led the state in housing permits issued for the last three years, with over 2,200 permits issued. Our administration has sought to guide this growth toward our climate and sustainability goals as much as possible, using the tools available to us in the form of zoning amendments and development agreements. The zero energy stretch code provisions in Section 4 would allow our city and other interested municipalities to take a comprehensive approach to building decarbonization, while helping the state achieve carbon emissions reduction goals. Removing the requirement for buildings to meet their entire energy demand through on or offsite renewable power generation is an important change for municipalities like New Haven to move forward with adopting a zero-energy stretch code. The stretch code must include strong energy efficiency standards but requiring energy development on site would overly hamper much needed development.

Instead, a municipal option for a stretch code should be instituted that requires buildings to be zero energy ready and includes a requirement or strong preference for electrification. An all-electric requirement or preference will ensure that the next generation of buildings does not contribute local air pollution. As the carbon emissions from the electric grid continue to decrease, the emissions associated with building operations will decline as well. It is also critical to include a requirement to account for the embodied carbon of new construction of larger buildings, as it is estimated by the International Energy Agency that producing building materials causes 11% of carbon emissions globally.

The stretch code provisions should include a stakeholder engagement process, facilitated by the Office of the State Building Inspector and the Codes and Standards Committee, to ensure that the stretch code provisions are workable. Once in place, incentives to encourage adoption should be made available. The Massachusetts Green Community designation, which includes a stretch code adoption requirement, makes grant funding available to designated communities. Today 90% of Massachusetts residents live in Green Communities – Connecticut should encourage stretch code adoption through similar incentives so that residents can lower their energy bills, breathe cleaner air, and reduce the pollution that causes climate change.

I urge you to support this legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Justin Elicker
Mayor, City of New Haven